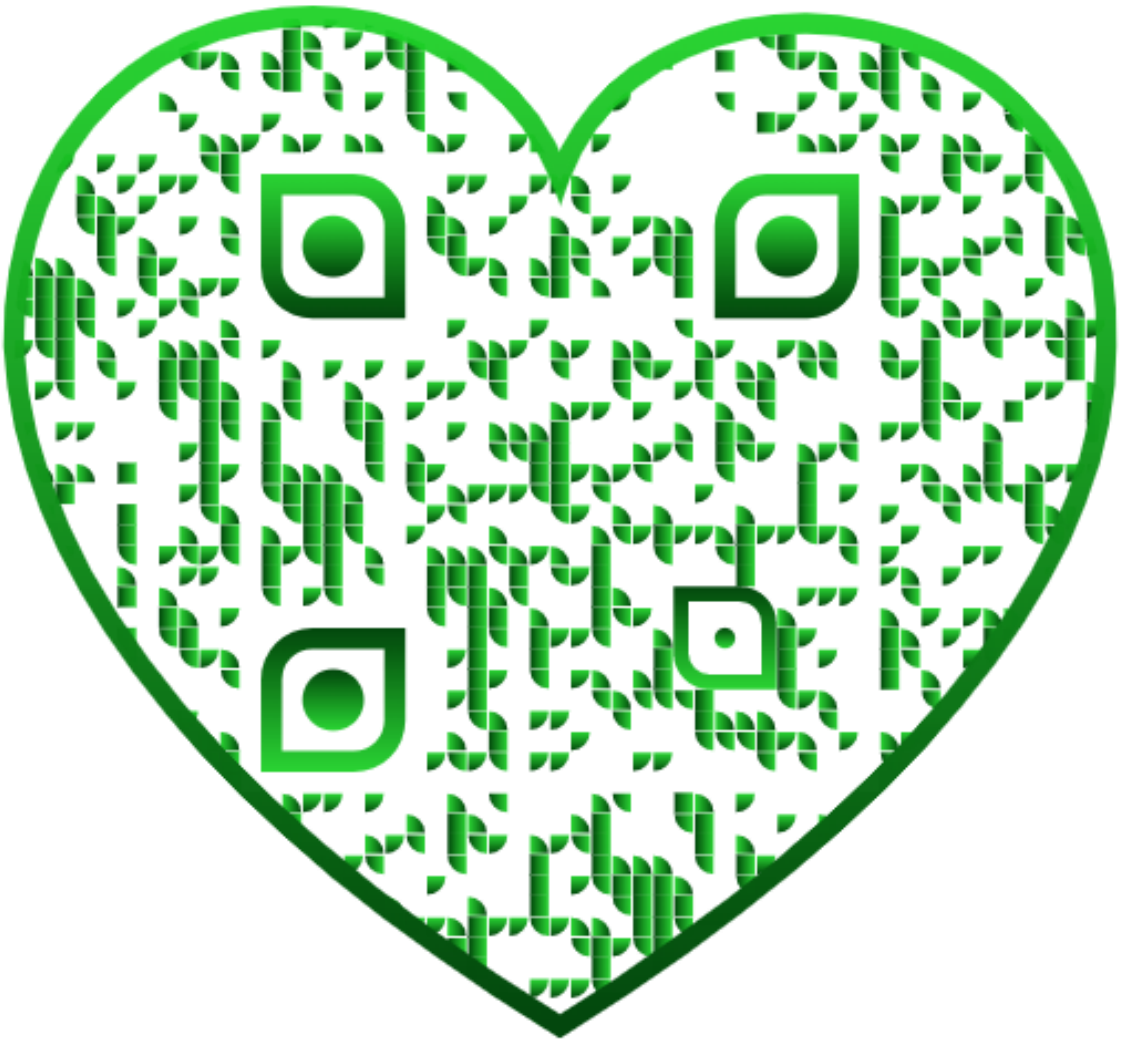
Michael Lockwood's

Buddhism's Relation to Christianity

Reviewed by

D.M. Murdock

Author of Christ in Egypt



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Introduction

"…Scholars, for over two hundred years, have been pointing out the influence of Buddhism on the origins of Christianity, but Christian theologians have, in the main, been indifferent to a serious study of this relationship. Such a study would require that they acquire a deep historical knowledge of Buddhism and a mastery of the languages of Pali, Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese among others.

"…Jesus and his disciples are allegorical, non-historical characters mixed together with historical characters (such as Pilate and some Temple priests)… Even the story of the 'Outcaste Woman at the Well' is a fictitious meta-narrative, though involving the, perhaps, historical persons of the Buddha and his 'beloved' disciple Ananda—if indeed *they* are historical!...

"…Jesus was an *allegorical* figure modeled on the founder of Buddhism and his *fifth century* BCE style of preaching: that of the homeless wandering monk….

"If the four canonical Gospels are studied from this perspective, evidence may emerge that the evangelists were, indeed, Indian—or persons trained in India or by Indians."

Dr. Michael Lockwood, *Buddhism's Relation to Christianity* (64-65, 196, 255)

"Eventually, scholars will have to concede—in my opinion—that the 'Jesus' of the gospels is a purely fictitious figure, like Hercules."

Dr. Christian Lindtner, "Comparative Gospels Studies in Review"

In the field of Christian-origins studies runs a persistent subcurrent that raises up the subject of comparative religion and mythology. This enduring thread has been part of what is called "mythicism," the work of the "Mythicist School," which represents part of what is called the "History of Religions School" as well. The research and scholarship in this subject are substantial,

dating back hundreds to thousands of years, depending on the figures or groups being studied.

The discipline of mythicism or mythicist school has produced some interesting and often outstanding scholarship, which was begun centuries ago but which has enjoyed a resurgence in the past couple of decades. In specific, the history of religions school included mythicist scholarship which focused on the origins of Christianity from the perspective that "Jesus Christ" as found in the New Testament ranks as a mythical figure. Now we can add to this important body of scholarship the anthology *Buddhism's Relation to Christianity* by Dr. Michael Lockwood, a professor of philosophy for 32 years in India.

Buddhism's Relation to Christianity is divided into nine sections, providing comparisons between Buddhist and Christian doctrines, traditions and rituals. The book highlights ancient artifacts and texts—primary sources—that provide evidence of parallels between the two religions, including not only the doctrines but also the sayings, deeds and other "biographical" details concerning the religions' purported founders. Taken together, the evidence provided by Lockwood is very suggestive, if not conclusive, that one of these religions influenced the other, directly or indirectly. As Lockwood (4) remarks, "There are many parallels between Buddhist doctrine and Christian doctrine."

The nine sections of the book comprise discussions of the following:

1. Examples of scholarship on Buddhist and Christian parallels;
2. Buddhist sculpture paralleling Christian gospel episodes;
3. Buddhist inscriptions with parallels to Christian doctrines;
4. Buddha's remake as a Christian saint, Josaphat;
5. Buddhist parables with parallels to Christian parables;
6. Parallels between the purported sayings of Buddha and Christ;

7. Priority of Buddhist innovations over similar Christian doctrines;

8. The historicity of Jesus; and

9. Theories vis-à-vis Buddhist, Judaic and Egyptian origins of Christian doctrines and traditions.

The first section of Lockwood's book lists several works from 1828 to 2009 that explore the similarities between Buddhism and Christianity, including studies by Arthur Schopenhauer, Max Müller, Richard Garbe, Zacharias Thundy, Elmar Gruber and Holger Kersten, Christian Lindtner and yours truly, D.M. Murdock. There are many more such works, in English and other languages such as German, a fact not lost on Lockwood, who incorporates important European scholarship at several points.

Buddhist Parallels in Sculpture

Section Two of *Buddhism's Relation to Christianity* discusses several sculptures of scenes from Buddha's life that either predate the "Christian" era or come from centuries before any proven Christian influence. When discussing what is "pre-Christian," it should be kept in mind that the "Christian" era did not suddenly begin with the alleged birth of Christ, at which point everyone in the world knew all about him and his doctrines.

What is 'pre-Christian?'

In other words, what is the "Christian" era in a particular place depends on when Christianity is first spread in that area. For example, although much of Europe was Christianized in the first millennium of the religion's existence, the nation of Lithuania staved off the faith until the 14th century; hence, the Christian era in Lithuania did not begin until that time. The same may be said of uncontacted aboriginal tribes in the Amazon and elsewhere: They remain in the pre-Christian era. Thus, a Buddhist artifact or scripture may date to several centuries into the common era and still be "pre-Christian" and completely uninfluenced by Christianity.

Furthermore, in many instances where the Buddhist artifact or tradition dates to a post-Christian period, the motif can be found in other religious and mythological traditions preceding the common era, often by centuries or millennia. Hence, the presence of these shared motifs within Buddhism could be attributable to those pre-Christian precedents, not necessarily to Christianity.

Tales of the Buddha

Various stories about "the Buddha" date to at least the sixth century BCE , and the sculptures provided by Lockwood represent scenes from his alleged life that are often based on texts dating to early Christian or pre-Christian times. Hence, it is impossible or unlikely for these Buddhist stories to have been copied from Christianity.

For example, the relief from Borobudur of the "Bodhisattva's first day of

school" (Lockwood, 33) dates from the eighth century AD/CE ; yet, the *text* in which this story appears, the *Lalitavistara Sutra* , dates to the third century AD/CE at the latest.

Miraculous Birth

So-called Christian motifs found in Buddhist sculpture include Buddha's miraculous conception and birth, through the side of Queen Maia, whom St. Jerome (*Adv. Jov* . 1.42) explicitly styled a "virgin":

> To come to the Gymnosophists of India, the opinion is authoritatively handed down that Budda, the founder of their religion, had his birth through the side of a virgin. [1]

The debate as to whether or not Buddha's mother was perceived by Buddhists as a "virgin" rages on, but Jerome's contention—which implies the doctrine's antiquity—would not be surprising, in consideration of the fact that the virgin-mother motif predates Christianity by millennia, as found in Egypt and in India, appearing several times in the Mahabharata, for example. [2]

Master and Disciples

There exist also images of Buddha surrounded by 12 or so figures, comprising disciples and others. The general motif of the godman/supernatural savior preaching divine concepts to disciples is well represented in Buddhistic imagery, and some of these purported "biographical" details shared by the masters Buddha and Jesus appear to be archetypical templates, rather than actual episodes from the lives of "historical" personages.

It should be briefly noted that there are many instances in the Bible and ancient mythology of this mystical formula of "the Twelve" or the "12+1," as the case may be. [3]

The Visit of the Sage

Another notable episode in the life of Buddha illustrated abundantly in

sculpture is that of the visit of the sage Asita to the baby Buddha, comparable to the visit of Simeon to the baby Jesus (Lk 2:25ff). (See Lockwood, 30-31)

Temptation by the Evil One

Yet another "Christian" motif that appears within Buddhism is the temptation of the supernatural savior by the evil being. Discussing the temptation of Buddha by the "demon" Mara, Lockwood (37) remarks:

> The Gospel of John makes no mention of the temptation of Jesus by the devil. In fact, this gospel rules this episode out as a possibility, as Jesus is said, in this account, to proceed immediately after his baptism, to enlisting five men as his first disciples, and then on to performing miracles and preaching. (The Buddha also had five disciples in the beginning of his preaching the Dharma.)

As we can see, not only are there important differences between the Christian gospels, indicating their fictional nature, but also the correspondences between Buddhism and Christianity are pronounced. In this instance, we read of two such parallel motifs: The temptation and the five initial disciples, both of which must have emanated *from* Buddhism *to* Christianity, in such a scenario of transference or "borrowing."

Walking on Water

Another motif well represented in Buddhist literature and artifacts such as a stone carving from Sanchi (1st cent. BCE) depicts the godman or his disciple(s) walking on water (Lockwood, 40). Both Buddha and Jesus, along with chosen disciples, are portrayed as walking on water, but the Buddhist tale clearly predates the Christian one, by many decades if not centuries.

Obviously, we cannot accept scientifically these supernatural water-walking miracles as historical fact, and the motif's inclusion in both the Buddhist and Christian narratives serves as a further indication of their *fictional* nature. Indeed, the miracle of walking on water may be found in other cultures as well, some of them clearly pre-Christian and often symbolizing solar entities or sun gods, as a reflection of the sun's rays on the water.

Regarding the antiquity of the water-walking motif, Lockwood (40) remarks:

> In India, accounts of the paranormal ability of walking on water are as old as the ancient epic, *Mahabharata* —long before the time of the Buddha.

Concerning these various parallels, Lockwood (42) quotes Dr. William N. Brown's conclusion:

> …To find this sort of most recondite handling of miraculous material at all in two separate bodies of religious literature should arouse suspicion, but to find it…attached to similar stories seems to me compelling testimony that the two stories are genetically connected. [4]

As Lockwood has shown further in this section, many such aspects from Christianity can likewise be found in Buddhist sculpture.

Buddhist Parallels in Inscriptions

Section Three concerns the inscriptions of famed Indian Buddhist king Ashoka or Aśōka (fl. 262-239 BCE), who sent out Buddhist missionaries to "all parts" of the known world. The traces of the missionaries can be found, evidently, all the way to Great Britain, although the extent of this reach remains a matter of debate. [5]

Lockwood's anthology includes a survey of Ashokan texts, such as the rock edicts from Erragudi, Andhra Pradesh, in which the emperor clearly states, referring to the "conquest through Dharma" or Buddhist practices:

> And such a conquest has been achieved by the "Beloved of the Gods" not only here [in his own dominions] but also in the territories bordering [on his dominions], as far away as [at the distance of] six hundred Yojanas, [where] the Yavana king named Antiyoka [is ruling and where], beyond [the kingdom of] the said Antiyoka, four other kings named Tulamaya, Antikeni, Maka and Alikasundara [are also ruling], [and] towards the south, where the Codas and Pandyas [are living], as far as Tamraparni. (Lockwood, 51)

Lockwood (53) notes that "Antiyoka" is Antiochus II (fl. 261-246 BCE), the Greek ruler of the Seleucid Empire, and "Tulamaya" is Ptolemy II Philadelphius (fl. 285-247 BCE), while "Antikeni" is Antigonas Gonatas of Macedonia (fl. 277-239 BCE), "Maka" is Magas of Cyrene (fl. c. 288-258 BCE), and "Alikasundara" is Alexander II of Epirus (fl. 272-255 BCE).

As Lockwood demonstrates by including several other such inscriptions, the same proclamation can be found in multiple places around the relevant area, providing further evidence of Buddhism's migration into the Near East, Greece, Egypt and Africa during the third century BCE .

Medical Missionaries

Ashokan Edict 2 from Girnar (Lockwood, 54) discusses the sending out of "medical missionaries," explicitly mentioning Antiochus's kingdom again. This fact rates as interesting, in light of the suggested appearance of the

“Therapeuts” or “healers” in Egypt sometime between this era and the first centuries BCE to AD/CE . These wandering healers were specified for both humans and animals; thus, this Buddhist mission represented an early form of “Doctors and Veterinarians without Borders.”

The edicts such as found near Kandahar and now in the Kabul Museum contain the text both in Greek and Aramaic, the latter eventually replaced by the former as the lingua franca of the era and area. This fact serves as further evidence of the existence in Aramaic-speaking areas of Buddhist ideas, with Buddhist doctrinal migrations into Aramaic-speaking cultures, such as at Antioch. Hebrew, it should be recalled, is a close relative of Aramaic, and it is widely believed that the “historical” Jesus spoke Aramaic. In this same regard, Aramaic was spoken as far east as the Bactrian kingdoms in what is now Iran and Afghanistan.

The contention that Buddhistic ideas could be found in Antioch—the city where, according to the biblical book of Acts (11:26), Jesus’s followers were first called “Christians”—three centuries before the apostle Paul supposedly spent much significant time in that city (Gal 2:11-14) is highly suggestive of Buddhistic influence on the Christian effort.

Buddha Becomes a Christian Saint

Section Four contains the fascinating and important story of the adoption of Buddha, by the name of "Josaphat," into the Christian pantheon of saints. For several centuries in the Middle Ages up to the 19th , Christendom heard the marvelous tales of Josaphat and Barlaam, until the Age of Enlightenment brought with it Buddhist studies that revealed the ruse.

As Lockwood (61) remarks, "The Christian legend was, in actuality, a transmutation of the life of the Buddha," a transmutation evidently occurring sometime between the third and seventh centuries AD/CE .

The Saints are Gods of Other Cultures

This fact of a transmutation of a non-Christian godman into a Christian saint is not limited to Buddha, as it occurred with several other figures from pre-Christian religion and mythology, including St. Ann, St. Lucy, St. Denis and St. Brigid, representing the deities Anna/Ana, Lucia/Lucina, Dionysus and Brighid/Brigid/Brigit/Bride, respectively.

If enterprising monks (or their priestly, pontifical or political leaders) were busy transmuting a Buddhist legend into a Christian tale as early as the third century, there is little reason to doubt that their predecessors were busily transmuting *other* Buddhist stories and doctrines into Christian tales and dogma—including the gospel story itself, which only emerges clearly and in detail into the historical record during the latter half of the *second* century—a mere decades before the Josaphat fabrication evidently was begun.

The extent of the Christianized Buddhist tale of Josaphat is remarkable, as we find it told in some 60 different languages (Lockwood, 63), having spread largely through Manichaeism.

The tale is highly important, instrumental in demonstrating how a godman is subordinated under another divine figure, through culture clash. In this case, Josaphat or Buddha becomes enlightened through Jesus Christ's love and grace, raising the Christian savior above the Buddhist godman.

The motive for this "pious fraud" is indicated in the following comment,

describing the Ethiopic edition of the Josaphat story:

> The Ethiopic version…opens with a reference to Thomas's mission in India, and so do Greek and Syriac texts. There follows the story of Josaphat, the son of an Indian ruler whose priests were alarmed by the spread of Christianity. When he was born, all the sages and astrologers predicted a splendid future for him except one, who foretold that he would become a Christian.
>
> To prevent such an outcome, the king brought up his son in secluded palaces and protected him from all contacts with the world. But a Christian sage, Barlaam, disguised himself as a merchant and inveighed his way into the youth's presence. He taught the prince Christian doctrine and finally converted and baptized him. The king tried to win back his son by every means he could think of, including an offer of half his kingdom. All the king's efforts failed. Josaphat abandoned his princely life and became an ascetic in the desert, joined there by his preceptor, Barlaam. The severely ascetic flavor of Barlaam and Josaphat and the story's glorification of monastic life presumable made it useful to Manicheans. The tale became a great favorite among Christian monks in the Middle Ages. (Lockwood. 63)

Thus, Christian monks tried to explain the ascetic and monastic traditions in India as derived from Christianity, since it was pretended that Christianity was a brand-new, divine revelation into a world devoid of such godly monkishness, a contention clearly proved false by the existence of Buddhistic monasticism centuries before the common era.

In reality, the evidence points to the opposite influence, of Buddhism preceding Christianity and making its way to the pertinent area, where monks transmuted it into the Christian story and doctrines. In consideration of this fact, it is understandable why this falsified legend became so popular over several cultures.

The same can be said of the legend of Thomas in India: It appears to have been created in order to explain why "Christianity"—purported to be a "new revelation"—could be found in particulars in India, long before Christ's purported advent. [6]

Parable Parallels

Section Five of *Buddhism's Relation to Christianity* discusses parables found in Buddhist traditions for which we currently possess only a literary record, without dateable sculptural depictions. Lockwood indicates he is interested in establishing Buddhist priority with these examples. The inference throughout the book is not only that the Buddhist doctrines and motifs preceded the emergence within Christianity of their counterparts but also that Christianity derived these parallels significantly *from* Buddhism.

Here too Lockwood (65) makes such mythicist views clear:

> …Jesus and his disciples are allegorical, non-historical characters mixed together with historical characters (such as Pilate and some Temple priests)… Even the story of the "Outcaste Woman at the Well" is a fictitious meta-narrative, though involving the, perhaps, historical persons of the Buddha and his "beloved" disciple Ananda—if indeed *they* are historical!

Thus, Lockwood also calls into question the existence of "the Buddha" as a single, historical figure. As it does with the figure of "Jesus Christ" of the New Testament, the evidence points to "the Buddha" as a fictional compilation of characters and motifs, some historical and some mythical. In this regard, Lockwood notes later (77) that there is a "Buddha" perceived as a "historical" figure, named "Gautama," and that there is also a Buddha who is transcendent, divine and unearthly, i.e., God:

> The "Buddha" here should not be confused with the historical Gautama Buddha, but rather understood as the transcendent Being of the Mahāyānists, whose counterpart, in Jewish minds, might be represented by the four-lettered (*tetra-grammaton*) YHWH (in Sanskrit…YHVH), with whom mystics experience an inexpressible union.

The confused or conflated figure of "the Buddha" with many Buddhas both mystical and literal cannot be deemed scientifically to represent a single, historical character.

The Lotus Sutra

Included in the Buddhist parables discussed by Lockwood are those of the Prodigal Son, the Woman at the Well, and the Good Samaritan. Lockwood (71) provides here a discussion of the famous Mahayana Buddhist text the "Lotus Sutra" or *Saddharma-Pundarika-Sutra* , also rendered the "Good News of the Lotus-Like Virtuous Path" and deemed the "New Testament of Asia."

The composition of the Lotus Sutra was evidently begun around 100 BCE and comprises 28 chapters by different anonymous authors, redacted possibly up to the end of the second century AD/CE . The sutra contains moralistic and missionary ideas, and preaches universal salvation and eternal life. This universality included women, which irked the sexist Buddhist community. Nevertheless, the text has proved highly popular since antiquity, a fact that argues for it being known to early Christians—and possibly serving as a significant influence upon Christianity.

The 500 Brothers

Another motif Lockwood (77) raises in relation to the parables and the Buddhist tactic of "skillful leading by misleading" (*upaya-kaushalya*) is the appearance in Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (15:6-7) of 500 "brethren" who supposedly witnessed the resurrected Christ. This motif has been used by Christians as "proof" that Christ was a historical figure, about whom Paul and these hundreds of others clearly knew. However, according to Buddhist scholar Dr. Christian Lindtner, this "historical" episode represents yet another example of "pious fraud" and propaganda:

> …The "more than 500 brethren," "most of whom are still alive," who are among those cited as eyewitnesses to Christ as raised from the dead, were originally the 500 Buddhist monks present at the death of the Buddha, as related in the *MPS* [*Mahā-Parinirvāna-Sūtra*] (part of the *MSV* [*Mūla-Sarvāstivāda-Vinaya*]. So, here Paul reveals himself, if we know the original source, as being guilty of a pious fraud, indeed. (Lockwood, 77)

Also according to Lindtner, this text, the MPS, part of the MSV, discussed

throughout BRC, serves as a source for the gospels, specifically hypothesized as part of the “Q” or *Quelle* text.

Parallel Sayings

Section Six deals with the sayings in common attributed to the Buddhist and Christian godmen. These “Sayings of Jesus” are also deemed the “Logia Iesou” or “Logia tou Kyriou,” the “Sayings of the Lord.” Buddha’s purported sayings are well known in many Buddhist texts, such as the famous *Dhammapada* . In reality, sayings of gods, goddesses, godmen, saviors, sages and heroes have been compiled and recited since remote antiquity and are not exclusive to Buddhism or Christianity.

In the pre-Christian Jewish text included in the Catholic Bible called “Ecclesiasticus,” also known as “The Wisdom of ben Sirach” or “The Wisdom of Jesus,” the name of both of the supposed originator of the sayings therein, as well as of the grandson compiling said *logia* , is “Jesus.” Hence, this pre-Christian text is full of *Logia Iesou* or “Sayings of Jesus,” a number of which are comparable to the sayings in the New Testament. Other cultures such as the Egyptian likewise possessed “wisdom sayings” or, perhaps, “dark sayings of old” (Ps 78:2) that evidently served as part of the mysteries.

Since mystery schools existed from Ireland to China, and all around the Mediterranean, at the time in question, i.e., the first centuries around the turn of the era, it is not surprising to find similar wisdom sayings in numerous places. Obviously, the sayings *were* pronounced by *someone* in the past —*many people* , in fact—and it is clear that they did not originate from the “mouth of God” but were passed along for centuries to millennia. Lockwood’s study of commonalities in the Buddhist and Christian sayings underscores this point and illustrates that there remains little startlingly new or exclusively sagacious about the purported *logia* of Jesus in the NT and elsewhere, such as the apocryphal gospels.

Lockwood (82-85) highlights some of the major parallel *logia* which reveal similar sentiments, a number that suffices to show a pattern or tradition of wisdom sayings among religious sages or mythical figureheads such as gods, et al.

Firsts Established by Buddhism

Section Seven (87ff) establishes the priority within Buddhism of several "Christian" doctrines, traditions and rituals, including:

1. Disciples as missionaries on a "Great Commission" to all the world;
2. Monasteries (and nunneries);
3. Monastic sexism subjugating nuns under monks;
4. Patriarchal lineages;
5. Bodhisattvas or "saints";
6. Relic veneration;
7. Use of confessions and absolutions;
8. Religious councils;
9. Printing of sacred scriptures; and
10. Begging and receiving of alms.

In the subsection on monasteries, Lockwood (90) remarks:

> The earliest, pre-Christian monasteries in Egypt and the Holy Land… almost certainly were evolved from those introduced by Emperor Aśōka's missionary monks. Can the archaeologists establish otherwise? Some of the early Christian Fathers, themselves, considered the Therapeutae to be Christian—they had no idea that these movements existed long before the presumed birth of Jesus. If Christianity was an outgrowth of these Buddhist movements, then the Christian Fathers were partly correct.

This contention of Buddhist monastics in Egypt centuries before the common era rates as singularly important in Jesus-mythicist studies, as, we assert, it

was significantly in Egypt, particularly at Alexandria, that much of the Christian effort took place.

Buddhist Sexism

The Buddhist attitude toward women—such as being subservient to men in the monastic hierarchy, as well as the doctrine that a woman must reincarnate as a man in order to attain to enlightenment—is reflected in the Pauline doctrines of exhorting women to be obedient to their husbands and to remain silent in church.

As an example of Buddhist sexism, in the pre-Christian Buddhist text "Admission of Women to the Order," we read:

> From this day on the nun shall not be allowed to reprove the monks officially, but the monks shall be allowed to reprove the nuns officially. This regulation shall be honored, esteemed, revered and worshiped, and is not to be transgressed as long as life shall last. (Lockwood, 93)

Some of the particulars in this section, such as ritualistic and administrative traditions like the patriarchal or guru lineages and master-disciple relationship (Lockwood, 96-98), as well as apostolic succession, are clear firsts within Buddhism and likely were adopted from there into Christianity.

Were the Therapeuts of Egypt Buddhists?

At this point, Lockwood (99ff) touches upon one of the more important discussions concerning the Buddhist presence in ancient Egypt: The mysterious Therapeuts at Lake Mareotis, near the city of Alexandria. Regarding the spread of Buddhism, after citing passages from Buddhist texts, Lockwood remarks:

> The Buddha's knowledge, then, was to be passed down generation after generation of monks, under the guidance of leading Elders ("*mahā-thēra-s* "), who had attained a thorough knowledge of the doctrine. It is in this sense that the term "*theraputta* " came to be applied to Buddhist monks in a monastery under the leadership of a

> *Mahā-Thēra* (“Great Elder”). “*Thēraputta* ” (Pāli) is a compound of the two words: *thēra*— elder, and *putta* = son(s). The fem. of the Pāli word *thēra* (“elder”) is *thēri* , from (Skt.) *sthavirī* or *sthavirā* , and “daughter,” (Skt.) *putrī* . Emperor Aśōka’s medical missionary monks who arrived in Alexandria, Egypt, in the 3rd century BCE and their followers and converts were to be known by this name, which, to the Greeks, would sound like “*therapeutai* .” These monks’ skill in healing the sick, both physically and spiritually, would enhance a medical connotation of the Greek term, “*therapeutai* ,” and its later English offshoots, “therapy,” “therapeutics,” etc.

Lockwood goes on to discuss the Therapeuts in greater depth, along with presenting views assigned to Christ in the New Testament that reflect Buddhist monasticism. Lockwood’s assessment of the Therapeuts as *Theraputta* appears to have been staring us in the face for quite some time, since it has been known for decades that there are figures in Buddhist lore called “Theraputta,” both as a name and as a title.

In this regard, after raising up the subject of the Therapeuts and their Judean cousins the Essenes, the Indian sage Swami Abhedananda (158) states:

> It is interesting to note the similarities between the Essenes and the followers of Buddha. The Buddhists were also called *Theraputta* , a Pali form of the Sanskrit Sthiraputra, meaning the son of Sthira, or Thera: one who is serene…

Indeed, we must keep in mind the Theravada school of Buddhism as well, the term “Theravada” meaning the “Teachings of the Elders,” a concept crystalized at Ashoka’s Great Council in 240 BCE . It has been suggested that the Theravadins may thus have been those sent out by Ashoka to “all points of the known world.” The word “Theraputta” appears to postdate this time.

In any event, needless to say, this source of the Greek name for this group of monastics described by the Jewish philosopher and writer Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE -50 AD/CE)—a name he attests is so ancient as to have lost its origin—rates as highly satisfying for a number of reasons, not the least of which that it explains how so much Buddhist doctrine ended up in the Christian effort, which is clearly a combination of Judaism and Paganism,

including and especially Buddhist and Egyptian religion. Here we find these two major influences dovetailing in precisely the area and the era in which much of Christianity was evidently founded.

The term Theraputta as meaning “son of the elder” makes sense also in consideration of the Therapeutan hierarchy as described by Philo, who discusses younger acolytes serving their elders. The most logical conclusion here is that Buddhist monks did indeed travel to Egypt, as stated in Ashoka’s inscriptions, to establish monastic communities, the “descendants” of one of which were the Therapeutai, who were largely Hebraic and Judaic in ethnicity by the time of Philo. In this scenario, their allegorical works as described by Philo and later identified by Eusebius as the early forms of the gospels were Jewish-Buddhist texts. Interestingly, we find this Therapeutan network not confined to Alexandria but also named as such in other locales, such as on the Greek island of Delos, where thrived a synagogue as well. [7]

In this regard, there does indeed exist evidence that Jews were influenced by Indian religion. In *Against Apion* (1.22/1.179), Jewish historian Josephus (37-c. 100 AD/CE) recounts the words of Clearchus of Soli (fl. 320 BCE), who told the story of his master Aristotle’s conversation with a Jewish man from “Celesyria” or Syria. Aristotle (384-322 BCE) supposedly stated that the man told him these Syrian Jews “are derived from the Indian philosophers; they are named by the Indians *Calami* , and by the Syrians *Judaei* , and took their name from the country they inhabit, which is called Judea...” [8]

Hence, at least three and a half centuries before the common era there were purportedly Indian “Jews” in Syria, whose institutions and communities may have welcomed readily the missionaries from Ashoka a few decades later.

Angels and Saints

Lockwood (101) further states that by the first to second centuries BCE the Buddhist supernatural hierarchy of the godman above the *devas* or “angels” and *bodhisattvas* or “saints” was already being formulated, such that this structure takes priority over and likely influenced the Christian supernatural hierarchy of Christ above the angels and saints.

In this section (102), Lockwood also provides a useful compilation of the

earliest extant imagery depicting the Buddha, from the Swat area (100-50 BCE) to the Gandharan (2nd -3rd cents. AD/CE). Here we can see that the tradition was begun well before Christ's purported advent, continuing to the time of the Christian effort, reflecting precedent and likely influence *from* Buddhism *upon* Christianity.

The Two Thieves

Later Christian imagery shows Christ with the same or similar hand mudras as Buddha, as well as in a pose between the "two thieves," analogous to the Buddha situated between the two subordinated Hindu gods Brahma and Indra. These two Indian gods, we learn from Lockwood (169), are depicted as representing the two ways in which Buddha is tempted by the demon Mara. Hence, they are comparable to the two "thieves" or lawbreakers in Christian tradition. (See also Lockwood, 102, 160)

Pythagoras and Apollonius of Tyana

The Therapeuts, Essenes and various unnamed mystery school brotherhoods all reflect influence from Indian spiritual traditions—and indeed we hear about the numerous Indian teachers from Alexander's expedition, along with stories of the Greek sage Pythagoras ("Buddha"+ "guru?") learning from Indians. In this regard, Clement Alexandrinus (*Strom* . 1.15) says, "Pythagoras was a hearer of the Galatae and the Brahmins." [9]

We also read about the sage Apollonius of Tyana journeying to the East to learn from the masters, including Indians, such as his own purported master, the "oldest of sages" Father Iarchus or Iarchas ("Arhat?," "Acharya?"), described as both a "great Buddhist religious reformer" and the "leader of the Brahmins."

Indians in the Mediterranean

Into an analysis of possible Buddhist influence on Christianity must also be factored the Greco-Bactrian kingdoms to the east of the germane area, as well as the bursting forth of trade from India with the Roman discovery in the first century BCE of the Indian monsoon wind shift accessible through the Red Sea route.

There exist numerous factors that speak of a significant and largely previously unaccounted Indian presence and influence in the Mediterranean at the precise time when Christianity was being formulated, including the following:

- Indian envoys sent to Rome and other parts of the Roman Empire;
- Stories of Indian saints immolating themselves in the West;
- Presence of thousands of Indian slaves at Rome and elsewhere in the Mediterranean;
- Numerous substances traded between the two worlds, including spices, elephants, tigers, precious stones, silk and artwork, such as the statue of the Indian goddess Laxmi found buried at Pompeii; and
- Caches of thousands of Roman coins found in a number of places in India;
- Testimony in Josephus that the Jews were descendants of Indian philosophers.

In addition to that of Buddha, the story of the Hindu god Krishna appears to have been known at Rome and elsewhere in the empire, likely because of Indian slaves bringing with them their worship. Hence, any universalizing efforts on the part of the Christian creators would likely incorporate elements of Krishnaism as well, which it evidently did. [10]

From Alexandria to Sri Lanka

In the opposite direction, Lockwood (104) describes a Buddhist text from Sri Lanka, the *Mahâvamsa* , which records the journey in 140 BCE of some 30,000 monks from a city called “Alexandria” to an important Buddhist council on that island. According to the text, the gathering drew 1.436 *million* monks from around the known world, not counting those already on Sri Lanka. Also according to the *Mahâvamsa* , these Alexandrian monks were led by a Greek named “Thera Maha-Dhamma-rakkhita.”

Here we learn that there existed a massive Greco-Buddhist presence in the second century BCE at a city named Alexandria! Lockwood (105) next discusses which Alexandria the city in question may have been, among a list of several cities so-named from Egypt to India. In this regard, Lindtner cites *Mahâvamsa* 5.80 as stating:

> "...the ruler (king Asoka) bade the kings all over the earth begin (to build) vihâras and he himself began to build the Asokârâma."

He then comments:

> Could it be true? From Alasanda the city of the Yonas came 30.000 monks (*Mahâvamsa* 29.39). To judge from the context, this city seems to be the Alexandria near Kâbul (Geiger). [11]

In response, Lockwood maintains that the only Alexandria of a size that could incorporate 30,000 monks appears to be that in Egypt, further remarking:

> One can argue endlessly about the reliability of the *Mahâvamsa* , but in my mind it's quite reasonable to interpret the statement as referring to the capital city of the Greeks (i.e., Egypt's capital city, Alexandria)!
>
> I feel quite confident that potential critics of this position certainly do not have any way of disproving it decisively.
>
> I have arguments in mind to demonstrate the significant authoring by Sanskrit and Pâli knowing scholars located in Alexandria, Egypt, of many Buddhist scriptures that have heretofore been assumed to have been authored in India. So much so that I wrote you about my theory that the rise of Mahâyânism was very much influenced by Buddhist scholars in Alexandria. [12]

Again, Lockwood raises up the Therapeuts of Philo to illustrate the significant presence of monastic—indeed *Buddhist* —practitioners at Alexandria by the time of Christ's alleged advent (early 1st cent. AD/CE).

Interestingly, it is in this Sri Lankan chronicle the *Mahâvamsa* where we hear

about the warrior-hero *Theraputta* . Could these 30,000 Greek monks from Alexandria be followers of Theraputta, as their cultic figurehead?

Relics and Confession

More discussion follows regarding the use of relics by religionists, a tradition clearly present in pre-Christian Buddhism that appears in later Christianity, possibly emphasized at Alexandria following the mass meeting in Sri Lanka around 140 BCE , after which the Buddhist monks likely returned to Alexandria with a renewed fervor to spread Buddhism. Conversely, Lockwood avers in private correspondence that it is possible the Alexandrian Buddhists began to focus on relics based on their experience with Egyptian religion, with its emphasis on a physical afterlife, a notion subsequently brought *to* the Buddhist world by these Therapeuts.

Other than this possible Egyptian derivation, the great emphasis on relics appears to be peculiarly Buddhist—until Christians evidently adopted it from Buddhism. The same contention may be made concerning the practices of confession and absolution, which Lockwood (111-115) shows existed in Buddhism before Christianity, likely comprising one source of filtering and syncretism.

Vested interests such as *The Catholic Encyclopedia* dismiss the Ashokan inscriptions, because, they claim, there is no physical evidence of Buddhist presence in the West, such as the well-known *stupas* or stone pillars by practitioners. Firstly, one wonders if, by using the principles of *upaya-kaushalya* , the likewise popular Egyptian *djed* pillar was utilized instead of the *stupa* . Secondly, the presence of the monasticism *itself* serves as physical evidence, as it has been filtered through the "natives" and their traditions, which in this case constituted the Egyptians, Greeks, Jews and Romans. Indeed, rather than stupas serving as evidence of Buddhist influence in Roman lands, one could point to all these other factors, including relic veneration along with confession and absolution, as such evidence.

The Calling of Councils

Lockwood's discussion of Buddhist councils (116ff) demonstrates a well-established structure, organization and hierarchy that were evidently copied

centuries later by Christians. These facts are reflected also in the astonished remarks of Catholic/Jesuit missionaries and monks who noted the extraordinary similarities between Buddhism and Christianity—for which notice the Jesuit missionary and traveler to the East, Abbé Huc, for one, was ex-communicated.

As we know, for centuries after Christ's purported advent, Christian authorities convened several councils (Lockwood, 118), in which doctrines were hashed out, often violently. That such Christian authorities were aware of Buddhism from a fairly early period is clear from remarks by Church fathers Clement of Alexander and Jerome. It is likely much more was written about the subject that has been destroyed and censored from the literary/historical record.

Printing of Scriptures

The next subsection discusses the mechanized printing of scriptures as a Buddhist innovation, yet another first that would indicate influence from Buddhism to Christianity, rather than the other way around, as many Christian scholars have attempted to prove. Interestingly, we discover that the first mechanically printed text was created in Korea in 750 AD/CE , a Buddhist sutra impressed on a single sheet of paper. The earliest printed *book* is that of the Diamond Sutra, in Chinese, completed in 868 AD/CE . The Koreans and Chinese continued the innovations for centuries before the West heard about Johannes Gutenberg's "invention" (refinement) of the printing press (15th cent.).

Alms-Giving

Finally in this section is the discussion of alms-giving, a distinctly Buddhist tradition that likewise ended up within Christianity (Lockwood, 122-129). This practice of alms-giving allows for the monks and nuns to meander, imparting blessings upon the faithful, in much the same way we see Jesus and his homeless band of brethren wandering around the countryside.

The Historicity of Jesus

Section Eight of *Buddhism's Relation to Christianity* (130ff) comprises a lengthy discussion of the "historicity" of Jesus Christ, reproducing at first the article from the internet site Wikipedia by the same name. The argument centers on whether or not, under the layers of mythical motifs that sober historians are not prepared to accept as "historical fact," there is a man named "Jesus," titled "the Christ," who had wandered about Judea and Galilee preaching a Hellenized and Romanized "Jewish" doctrine full of unique sayings attributable to a "historical" figure.

This "euhemerism" or "evemerism"—the theory named after the Greek philosopher Euhemeros or Evemeras (4th cent. BCE), who argued that the gods and goddesses were kings, queens and heroes of antiquity puffed up by supernatural biographical filler—may sound satisfying at first. However, as these mythological and other precedent layers are peeled, there remains no "historical" core to the onion, and a composite of 20 people, historical and mythical, is simply *no one* .

Jesus Mythicism

This latter contention of Christ as a mythical or fictional composite constitutes part of what is called the "mythicist theory," "mythicist case," "mythicist school" or simply "mythicism," here specifically "Jesus mythicism."

The inclusion of the Wikipedia article by Lockwood is deliberate in that it shows how the subject of Christ's historicity is accepted *a priori* with little discussion and a hand-waving dismissal of the significant body of literature from the mythicist school over the past several centuries. Wikipedia is, of course, edited by the public, and these editors tend to be very protective of their articles, with Christians guarding Christianity-related subjects, and so on. Hence, these articles are biased in favor of received Christian history.

In any event, the subject of Jesus mythicism in this Wiki article is merely touched upon and handled highly inadequately, for the reasons above. The article also presents arguments for historicity that have been rebutted, such as

the value of supposed independent testimonies in the works of the ancient writers Josephus, Pliny, Suetonius and Tacitus, et al. [13] Yet, this fact of rebuttal has not been included in this Wiki article, nor have any other germane details from the extensive mythicist scholarship dating back hundreds of years, the screed ending with a shallow dismissal of countless thousands of pages of serious scholarship that shows many if not most of the article's contentions to be false, such as:

> Nevertheless, non-historicity is still regarded as effectively refuted by almost all Biblical scholars and historians… "There are those who argue that Jesus is a figment of the Church's imagination, that there never was a Jesus at all. I have to say that I do not know any respectable critical scholar who says that any more."

Again, the inclusion of this article demonstrates the mainstream view of these issues in the world at large, so it is useful for that reason and to serve as a thesis refuted by this present work, *Buddhism's Relation to Christianity* .

Buddhist and NT Scholars

As Lockwood goes on to show, there exist especially in the field of Buddhism many respectable scholars —the most critical, in fact—who will contend either that Christ was a historical figure who had studied Buddhism or that he is a mythical composite significantly dependent upon Buddhism. As Lockwood demonstrates, New Testament scholars in general remain uninformed in studies of the broader milieu in which the Christian effort originated. Hence, while their criterion for a scholar to be "respectable" is the unscientific and uncritical acceptance of Church doctrine and history, we would define "respectable" scholars as those who look outside of the Bible and possess a more complete picture of world at the time, particularly the very many potential and probable influences on Christian origins, including and especially Buddhism.

A longstanding complaint in the field of Buddhist studies, is, in fact, the seemingly willful ignorance of these external influences and the derogation of those who have raised them as "disrespectable" and "non-scholars." In other words, the field of NT scholarship has been set apart in an arrogant bubble of untouchability, as divinely unique as its subject. That barrier, however, is

falling, and the denigration of comparative-religion scholars and mythicists as “unrespectable” needs to be tossed away.

Criticisms

Downsides to this book include the lack of a bibliography and index, as well as the format, which can be difficult and confusing to follow at times. Not infrequently, I found it challenging to discern who was saying what, a difficulty that could be fixed by changing the formatting of quotes and annotations. Fortunately, of course, there are many citations with bibliographical material.

Also, the chapters are in need of subheadings for different sections. The lack of chapter headings and the book title in the page headers is unfortunate as well. The print is a bit on the small side, which is difficult on aging eyes especially.

As concerns the actual content, the reader is directed to the numerous comments I have made throughout this review and summary. Substantially, I concur with the thesis of Buddhistic texts utilized in the creation of much Christian tradition, doctrine and ritual, an effort largely undertaken at Alexandria. I disagree with some of the details, and I find other parallel-pieces that also would have been available to the gospel writers and that seem to fit the puzzle better. In my opinion, some adjustments here and there are needed in the overall thesis.

Gematria?

Moreover, the gematria angle of the theoretically Sanskrit-inspired Greek texts (“Christian Lindtner Theory” or “CLT”) is difficult for a non-specialist to follow and appreciate. The numerical part of the CLT is too esoteric for most, but its inclusion may be instrumental to others who wish to see an illustration of typical Sanskrit memorization techniques that may have been used in the writing of the Greek New Testament.

Indeed, it must be kept in mind that Hindu Sanskrit-singers in fact have composed their sacred poems in this careful and meticulous manner, being conscious of the sacredness of the subject and task, as well as mastery of the ability to pass along these sacred texts over a period of centuries without benefit of relatively nonperishable writing materials. In other words, the

sacred texts were meant to be repeated orally and to be memorable even to small children. If we keep this practice in mind, along with all the other factors, the contention becomes plausible that at least some of the Greek New Testament was composed in this manner.

Shortcomings aside, this book represents a very valuable research tool, particularly for the fields of Jesus mythicism and comparative religion and mythology.

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1 Schaff, 6.380. The original Latin of section 1.42 titled *A virginibus procreatorum fabulae* is as follows: *Apud Gymnosophistas Indiae, quasi per manus, hujus opinionis auctoritas traditur, quod Buddam, principem dogmatic eorum, e latere suo virgo generarit.* (Hieronymi, 286)

2 For more information on Indian and other virgin mothers, see my books as well as *Virgin Mother Goddesses of Antiquity* by Dr. Marguerite Rigoglioso.

3 See, e.g., my article "The Twelve in the Bible and Ancient Mythology," freethoughtnation.com/forums/viewtopic.php?f=16&t=2639

4 Brown, 60.

5 See *Suns of God* for a discussion of apparently Buddhist artifacts, including images, traditions and language connections in Ireland, for example. In short, many of these ideas, in germ at least, appear to have spread with the Indo-European migrations that included language and other aspects of culture.

6 For parallels between Thomas and Tammuz or, in India, Tamas, see my book *Suns of God: Krishna, Buddha and Christ Unveiled* (18ff).

7 See my book *Christ in Egypt* for further discussion of the Therapeuts and other brotherhood sects and guilds around the Mediterranean.

8 Josephus/Whiston, 615. Josephus's original Greek is: κἀκεῖνος τοίνυν τὸ μὲν γένος ἦν Ἰουδαῖος ἐκ τῆς κοίλης Συρίας. οὗτοι δέ εἰσιν ἀπόγονοι τῶν ἐν Ἰνδοῖς φιλοσόφων, καλοῦνται δέ, ὥς φασιν, οἱ φιλόσοφοι παρὰ μὲν Ἰνδοῖς Καλανοί, παρὰ δὲ Σύροις Ἰουδαῖοι τοὔνομα λαβόντες ἀπὸ τοῦ τόπου: προσαγορεύεται γὰρ ὃν κατοικοῦσι τόπον Ἰουδαία. τὸ δὲ τῆς πόλεως αὐτῶν ὄνομα πάνυ σκολιόν ἐστιν: Ἱερουσαλήμην γὰρ αὐτὴν καλοῦσιν. (Josephus, Flavius. *Flavii Iosephi opera* . B. Niese. Berlin: Weidmann, 1892.)

9 Roberts, *ANCL* , 4.398.

10 See my book *Suns of God: Krishna, Buddha and Christ Unveiled* for a further discussion of the apparent influence of Hinduism on Christianity.

11 Lindtner, in private correspondence to D.M. Murdock, 1/2/2013.

12 Lockwood, in private correspondence to D.M. Murdock, 1/2/2013.

13 See, e.g., my books and articles examining the merit of these various accounts.

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